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THE SHORT COURSE SERIES

THE MAN AMONG THE MYRTLES

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General Preface

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

The Short Course Series

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THE MAN AMONG THE MYRTLES

A STUDY IN ZECHARIAH'S VISIONS

BY

THE EDITOR

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1913

TO

M. A.

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"THE fault is ours, not theirs, if we wilfully misinterpret the language of ancient prophets, if we persist in understanding their words in their outward and material aspect only, and forget that before language had sanctioned a distinction between the concrete and the abstract, between the purely spiritual as opposed to the coarsely material, the intention of the speakers comprehended both the concrete and the abstract, both the material and the spiritual, in a manner which has become quite strange to us, though it lives on in the language of every true poet."

MAX MÜLLER.

I

THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

Chapter I. 1-6

THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

In ver. 1 Zechariah is described as the grandson of "Iddo the prophet." Does this mean that Iddo belonged to the same prophetical order as his illustrious descendant Zechariah? The Masoretes were of opinion that it did. They adopted the view that when a prophet is defined by the addition of his father's or grandfather's name, the ancestor so named was also a seer or prophet. Consequently they have joined together the two Hebrew words by an ordinary connective accent. In this case, however, they have helped to confuse the grandfather of Zechariah with Iddo the seer who prophesied concerning Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, in 2 Chron. ix. 29; but as there is nothing in the order of the Hebrew words to necessitate this identification the Revised Version prefers to insert a

comma after Iddo—"Iddo, the prophet" —and thus limit the designation "prophet" to the son of Berechiah himself. The insertion of the comma is not so trivial as it seems. It helps to set in a clearer light the personality of the prophet.

1. His Comparative Youth.

As the son of Berechiah, Zechariah must have been comparatively young when he began to prophesy in B.C. 520. He is not to be identified with the "young man" referred to in chap. ii. 4; but if his grandfather Iddo was one of the priests who went up from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua in 537 (Neh. xii. 4), Zechariah himself could not have been of any great age when he began to prophesy in the second year of Darius Hystaspis. His first recorded prophecy overlaps the work of Haggai, being dated one month earlier than Haggai's concluding message (Zech. i. 1; Hag. ii. 20); but as the latter was one of the old men who had seen the house of God in its former glory, Zechariah

can only be described as his younger and more ideal colleague. It may even be suggested that this is the explanation of the seemingly inaccurate expression "unto them" in ver. 3. Grammatically it can only refer to its antecedent "fathers" in ver. 2; but as the prophet was sent, not to the fathers, but to the elders of his own generation, it is conceivable that Zechariah, because of his youth, allowed his thought to include both classes in one—the older men who were the leaders of the returned exiles and the former generation of Israel whose children and representatives they were. Instinctively, therefore, had he framed an expression that was equally applicable to both. He placed the old men, ancient and modern, in one and the same class.

Still, this is not to be understood as implying that he the exponent of a new era had nothing but cynicism towards the ideals of his predecessors. The merest suspicion that he was prepared to stand aloof from, or to hurl the cynic's ban at, Israel's past, would have disqualified him forthwith as

a divinely-appointed organ of revelation. A true prophet must not only address himself to the needs of his own age; he must be one with it in its aspirations and problems, and seek to elevate it to a higher spiritual level by the very depth of his kinship. Hence, instead of the accepted reading "your fathers" in ver. 2, Codex A[1] would introduce the first personal pronoun, saying, "The Lord hath been sore displeased with *our* fathers." There was no conscious intention on Zechariah's part to separate himself from the elders of the people. Standing on the accepted basis of Israel's past, he was only seeking to take the exiles back to the glory of forgotten ideals. He was a reformer, not an innovator in the faith and customs of their fathers. And in this respect he was a teacher for all time. It is no mark of greatness in any age when reverence for the past is conspicuous by its absence. The first test of a growing and vigorous national life is gratitude for those who have gone before.

[1] The Septuagint.

2. The Severity of the Fathers' Fate.

"The Lord hath been sore displeased with our fathers"—lit., hath been angry with anger—a Hebraic expression, consisting of the finite verb with its cognate accusative, and designed to bring out the intensity of the verbal action or the awe-inspiring energy of the divine wrath. So intensely did the Septuagint translators feel this that they introduced the adjective "great" from chap. vii. 12, and read, "The Lord hath been incensed against our fathers *with a great indignation*."

The explanation of this wrath is to be sought in the peculiar heinousness of the sin. Their fathers had been guilty, not only of walking in evil ways, or practising evil doings, but also of continued impenitence and disobedience after they had been summoned to submission. It was refusal to hear, or apostasy. Disobedience, in its strict sense, may simply mean a failure to hear, or hearing amiss, but the notion of active disobedience, which so easily follows

this inattentive or careless hearing, is readily superinduced on the original signification. Remissness on the part of Israel when Jehovah is the speaker is really rebellion or apostasy in essence. These two stages in the development of moral evil are quite distinctly marked by the two Hebrew synonyms employed by Zechariah. Not only did the fathers fail to hear, when the former prophets remonstrated with them, but they refused to incline their ears, or give attention, when Jehovah, the God of Israel, drew near to confirm or vindicate His word. "They did not *hear*, nor *hearken* unto Me, saith the Lord."

In consequence that former generation had been compelled to bear the severity of divine chastisement. As a nation they had succumbed and disappeared amid the dark storm-clouds of the exile. "Out of the north" had come that dreaded scourge depicted by Jeremiah. The contents of the seething cauldron had been poured over the land, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem learned, when too late, that the Parable of

the Almond Branch, no less than of the seething cauldron, had been tragically fulfilled —"I am watching over My word to perform it" (Jer. i. 12, 14). Is this not the meaning of the emphatic Paseq in Zech. i. 6? It is placed after the adversative "but" to bring out the striking contrast between transitory human life and the enduring and unfailing potency of the divine word. "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? *But* My words and My statutes . . . did they not overtake your fathers?" (R.V.) "Rarely has punishment, though lame, failed to overtake the criminal fleeing before her?"[1] So it fared with Israel. She turned a deaf ear to Jehovah's word, but it dogged her footsteps like a divine *goel*, and overtook her at the last.

3. The Call to Repentance.

"Return unto Me . . . and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts" (ver. 3). Does this mean that the returning grace of

[1] Horace, *Carm.* III. 2, 31.

Jehovah was dependent on the heartfelt penitence of the people ? No, the preacher, in reading this great text, may well follow the hints supplied by the Hebrew tenses, and prepare himself for one of the profoundest lessons of Old Testament theology. In *Sermons in Syntax*[1] the suggestion has been hazarded that while the idiom here employed undoubtedly expresses design or purpose in a sufficient number of instances, there are not lacking others where the element of sequence is allowed to recede into the background, and the clauses connected by "and" are conceived simply as co-ordinate. Cf. Gen. xvii. 1–2, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect. *And* I will make My covenant between Me and thee." The "and" here is not consecutive in the sense that the framing of a covenant is made dependent on the perfect allegiance of the man. The spring of the divine action is found in El Shaddai Himself, and since both the allegiance and the covenant are traced back, like *parallel* streams, to His

[1] P. 220.

revealed will and character, the connection between them is suitably represented by the insertion of the simple copulative. "Walk before Me" is, therefore, a divine injunction that looks in both directions—back to the character of El Shaddai and forward to the fulness of the covenant. Nevertheless it is not the covenant that is contingent on the obedience: it is the obedience that is stimulated by the covenant. "When it is said in Scripture, 'Turn ye unto Me and I will turn unto you,' we are reminded of our freewill. When we reply, 'Turn us to Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned,' we confess that we are first aided (*præveniri*) by the grace of God."[1]

This is the key to our present passage. God has not waited for Israel's response. The God of their fathers has taken the initiative. The mere fact that Zechariah has now appeared as an organ of revelation is the one proof needed that Jehovah, the God of Israel, has turned to them with the wonders of His grace, and that they, on their

[1] *Concil. Trident.*, cited by Pusey.

part, should return to Him with open hearts. For why thus dwell on the love of God for Israel, if not to incite responsive love *in* Israel—responsive love as the deepest motive for Old Testament morality ? Legal righteousness is not the burthen of the Old Testament after all, and legal righteousness is not, and cannot be, the burthen of any New Testament creed. Righteousness, as in the Pauline Epistles, is often a synonym for grace. There was a Power, not themselves, making for mercy.

Therefore be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets prophesied in vain. But be ye as your fathers' God, the framer and vindicator of the covenant. For He has returned unto you in love, and will return more and more, as you are prepared by prayer and heartfelt contrition for the fulness of the revelation. Say, then, with Herrick in *Noble Numbers* :—

"Sick is my heart! O Saviour! do Thou please
To make my bed soft in my sicknesses:
Lighten my candle, so that I beneath
Sleep not for ever in the vaults of death;

The Prophet Zechariah

Let me Thy voice betimes i' th' morning hear:
Call, and I'll come; say Thou the when, and where.
Draw me but first, and after Thee I'll run
And make no one stop till my race be done."

II

THE MAN AMONG THE MYRTLES

Chapter I. 7-17

THE MAN AMONG THE MYRTLES

THREE months have elapsed since the prophet's first call to repentance, and in the interval no response has been made to the urgency of his appeal. Probably the leaders of the people felt that as there was no sign of the promised political upheaval (Hag. ii. 21–23) they had no encouragement to go on with the work, and no pledge that the rebuilding of the walls would be crowned with anything like success. In these circumstances repentance might be an indispensable requirement; but in view of the fact that the impoverishment of the exile was still lying upon them, and that the Messianic crisis was still an unrealised hope, what could the community do but follow the safe policy of waiting, or cry, like the man among the myrtles, "O Lord of Hosts,

how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem . . . against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" Zechariah himself was prepared to re-echo that cry. He was a priest no less than a prophet. He would identify himself with the people in all their aspirations and problems; and, therefore, gathering into his own bosom the perplexities that weighed upon them, he resolved to go in before Jehovah, and among the myrtle-trees of a divine contemplation think out the whole mysterious providence for himself.

I. Zechariah among the Myrtle-Trees.

Following the imagery of chap. vi. 1, the Septuagint reads "mountains" instead of "myrtles" in ver. 8, though the two passages, in character and diction, are not by any means identical. The term is, no doubt, a late one, not being found earlier than Deutero-Isaiah, but it is sufficiently

attested by Isa. xli. 19, etc., and by the Arabic word *hadas*, which is still found in the modern dialect of Yemen. A similar interest attaches to the term *metsulah* (ver. 8), which may be rendered "a valley bottom," or "a shady place," according as it is derived from the root *tsul* or *tsalal*—the Septuagint being in favour of the latter rendering.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Jerusalem, perhaps in the deep ravine of the Kedron, the prophet found a grove of myrtle-trees where he could retire for silent meditation and prayer. And here, for three months, sometimes by day and oft-times by night, he had burdened himself with the people's anxieties, and waited for a divine answer to their cry. Like Jesus among the olive trees of the same Kedron valley, Zechariah wrestled and waited for the unveiling of the divine purpose. And when it came, draped in the alluring symbolism of the night, it was simply the solicitude of his waking hours that erected and peopled the stage of his nocturnal vision. We are

reminded of Savonarola in his efforts to arouse the magnates of Florence. He had read and re-read the prophets of Israel in preparation for his great sermons; and, as his biographer so justly remarks, it was not surprising that in this state of mind he should have beheld visions. The night before his last Advent sermon he saw in the middle of the sky a hand bearing a sword, upon which these words were inscribed, *Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter.* Suddenly the sword was turned towards the earth; the sky darkened; arrows and flames rained down; terrible thunderclaps were heard; and all the world was a prey to war, famine and pestilence. The vision ended with a command to Savonarola to make these things known to his hearers, to inspire them with the fear of God, and to beseech the Lord to send good shepherds to His church, so that the lost sheep might be saved.[1]

The real point of interest is that in both instances the vision came as the result of

[1] Villari, p. 154.

long-continued *preparation*. It is of no vital significance whether the message came in the plastic form of a dream, and during the hours of sleep (cf. Ps. cxxvii. 2, R.V. margin); or in the more graphic delineation of a midnight vision beheld among the myrtle-trees themselves; or, what is not at all unlikely, that it came in the normal way of spiritual intuition, as the revealing spirit suggested to the brooding prophet the nature of the divine message, and allowed him to convey it to the leaders of the people in the metaphorical language of the poets.[1] In either case, the laws of language, as of psychology, are fully recognised in its depiction, and a period of preparation is divinely crowned by a definite communication of truth. Was it not so even on the hill of transfiguration? "*As He prayed*, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering." Ah, child of the Kingdom, go and kneel beside thy Saviour! Thou art never so great nor so strong as when

[1] Cf. the phrase "talked *with*" or "*in* me," ver. 9.

thou kneelest beside Him. That is the way to feed thy better nature and to feel thy kinship with the skies. The blessed light of transfiguration falls upon every Zechariah who prays.

2. The Man among the Myrtles.

Wellhausen's remark that the original text has been corrupted by a later writer, "who confused the man among the myrtles, *i.e.*, Jehovah Himself, with the angel interpreter," is one that raises the whole question as to the number of *dramatis personæ* introduced by Zechariah into his vision. Probably, as a first step, it is enough to postulate two personal factors—the divine and the human. On the one side we have the approach of a divine personality seeking intercourse with the human; and, on the other, a spiritually prepared instrument, responsive like an Æolian harp to the felt breath of the Eternal. These two correlated factors enter into personal communion, and a divinely-inspired message is the result. In

the filling in of this outline, however, the sacred artist has gone far beyond the requirements of so simple a dualism. Alike on its divine and human sides, he has elaborated his sketch into a finished canvas, which is not only indebted to the teaching of the past, but is charged also with the inspiring prospect of a coming Messianic ideal. It is a marvellous creation this theophany among the myrtle-trees; and it is not to be wondered at if the prophetic limner, in filling in the details, has wavered between the angel and the man. There can be no doubt that the man among the myrtles and the angel of the Lord (vers. 11, 12) are practically identical, and are well fitted in their union to express Zechariah's conception of the Divine. On its human side, too, a similar elaboration of the picture is not difficult to trace. The waiting prophet is represented as assisted and instructed by a heavenly exegete, who is not unlike the interpreting angel of Job xxxiii. 23. In this, again, we have a distinct reminiscence of the past, but with

an equally profound anticipation of the future. In the last resort, the heavenly exegete points us forward to that great instructor of the human conscience, the divine spirit of revelation, who would ultimately dwell in the human heart and guide God's people into all the truth. In fine, in the completed picture of what took place in the grove of myrtles we have at once a definite foreshadowing of the Incarnation and a clear anticipation of Pentecost.

Not indeed that the prophet himself knew, or could know, that this was the necessary outcome of his symbolism; but if Socrates in the Symposium, or Phaedrus on the banks of the Ilissus, could convey glimpses of the future, which could hardly have been understood at the time when they were uttered,[1] why might not the seer on the banks of the Kedron receive and convey glimpses of a coming Messianic ideal that are no less suggestive in their imagery? Hebrew prophecy is not less than Grecian philosophy; and if Zechariah sought to

[1] Jowett's translation, vol. ii. p. 3.

portray his communion with the Divine in terms that are eloquent of the future, we may interpret the entire vision in the light of that fact, and paraphrase it as follows :—

At the hour of night he beheld a man (not a rider [1]) standing among the myrtle-trees that were in the valley bottom, and behind him, on horses red, sorrel, and white, a company of apocalyptical riders, who were awaiting his commands. Greatly astonished at the sight of these mounted scouts, the prophet could only ejaculate, "What are these, my lord?" although, as he asked the question, he was intuitively assured (ver. 9^b) that a divine answer would speedily be forthcoming. Whereupon the man among the myrtles answered and said, "These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth; and even now they have arrived from their commission to report what they have seen and heard." And they, recognising the signal to draw near, said to the man among

[1] Cf. Kittel's footnotes.

the myrtles, "We have walked to and fro through the earth, and behold there is no sign of any impending change—all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest." This was sad news! for all these months the prophet had been waiting for some sign of the coming political ferment which was to be the token of their promised Messianic deliverance. Yet even while he lingered, the man among the myrtles lifted his eyes to heaven, and said, "O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem . . . against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?"

It was enough! The Church of God had at last found a champion. The cause of Israel had been espoused by a divine kinsman or *goel*, and even though he did not stand with a drawn sword in his hand, like the Captain of the Lord's host in Josh. v. 14, he held and wielded a weapon diviner far—what Bunyan would have called the weapon of "all prayer." He had gathered into *his* bosom the perplexities that weighed upon the nation, and among the myrtle-

trees of a divine agony and appeal had spread out the whole mysterious providence before Jehovah. And the answer given was designed for the Church.

3. The Church among the Myrtles.

Like Savonarola at the close of his vision, Zechariah is commissioned to make these things known to the people, that they might be inspired with the fear of God, and dedicate themselves without reserve to the working out of a divine purpose. Hence in verses 13, 14 the answer comes, not so much to the man among the myrtles, as to Zechariah himself, who is enjoined by the angel who talked with him to proclaim the divine message to Israel. Let Israel come and stand where he stood, in the same grove of myrtles, and the great spiritual lessons that had thrilled and comforted him would also inspire and comfort her.

Let her learn first the truth suggested by *the mounted servants* of Jehovah. Human life is not so defenceless as many a

harassed soul believes. Divine agencies are at work throughout the entire human family, and not only in death, but chiefly in life, the human spirit is attended by those apocalyptical riders. It may be so in death.

"Born 'neath the curse of the comet,
Bred on the desert sand;
I have roamed since my birth in the wastes of the earth,
And die in an alien land,
Where humming-birds flash in the sunlight,
And the dazzling orchids nod;
And a Rider waits on a high, pale horse
To carry a soul to God.

The howl of the hungry jackal
Wails o'er the moonlit plain;
And I hear the song and the rhythmic gong
Of an Indian marriage train.
Then the vision fades; but the Rider waits
In the moonlight by my side,
And gladly I clutch at his outstretched hand
And mount for my long last ride."

It is a beautiful fancy; but how much deeper is the thought of Zechariah that Israel, through all the vicissitudes of life, is attended by those far-travelled horsemen. The returned exiles were not to imagine

that Jehovah had left them to their own resources, or that no one was so interested in their national well-being as to espouse or vindicate their cause. No one who had caught a glimpse of the mounted servants of Jehovah in the Kedron valley would ever weaken or disquiet his spirit with the fear that he had been left alone in the battle. The human wrestler is not alone. He is guarded by divine agents who are ever on the alert. And no greater boon could be conferred on any distressed soul than to have its eyes opened, as the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, to behold the horses and chariots of fire that were round about Elisha (2 Kings vi. 17). Well may the prayer of each Zechariah be :—"O Lord of Hosts, illumine the eyes of Israel Thy servant, that among the myrtle-trees of a divine contemplation she may behold the mounted scouts of the Lord."

On the other hand, there was the other significant lesson of Jehovah's *silence*. His mercy had been withdrawn from Jerusalem these threescore and ten years. That

silence, however, was not to be interpreted as apathy or impotence. There might be no sign as yet of the coming political upheaval, but the very security in which the nations were resting was the calm of a ripening judgment. Just as a clear heat by day, or a cloud of dew by night, helps to fill out and ripen the grain until the day of ingathering has come, so Jehovah was resting and brooding over the affairs of the nations until the cup of their iniquity was full (cf. Isa. xviii. 4). Hence the voice said, "Cry, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem with a great jealousy. And I am sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction." As in the time of Nahum, the great world-powers had exceeded their commission. They had carried the chastisement of Israel far beyond the divine intention. In the ruthlessness of their conquest they had violated every instinct of humanity, and therefore the violence with which they had subjugated the conquered states would

recoil on their own heads, and they would perish in the flames of their own kindling.

For this reason, and as a concluding lesson, let Israel forthwith begin *the work of restoration.* Her warrant for so doing was found in the intervention of her covenant God. The verbal form "I am returned" at the beginning of ver. 16 is not to be regarded as a prophetic perfect, announcing the certainty of a coming event, like the future "I will return" of the Septuagint. It is a simple present perfect, indicating the reality of a past action, but one continued into the present—a past action which was Israel's sufficient warrant for addressing herself to the work. "Thus saith the Lord: I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies, My house shall be built in it . . . (yea) My cities through prosperity shall be spread abroad, and the Lord shall yet *have mercy upon* (LXX) Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." In fact, He who had chosen Israel at the first as His Kingdom of priests, His Jeshurun, had again returned to the object of His choice, and

comforted her with the fulness of His love. No higher instruction could be given and no worthier service could be engaged in. Israel was invited to stand among the myrtle-trees of a deep, spiritual communion, that the election of love might be responded to by the obedience of law. That is the sum of the whole matter. Jehovah had returned to Jerusalem with covenant love; therefore Israel must arise and build.

III

THE DISHORNING OF THE NATIONS

Chapter II. 1-4

(In Hebrew)

THE DISHORNING OF THE NATIONS

The second vision follows in natural sequence upon the first; but this is no reason for placing it in the same chapter, as the English Bible has done, and ignoring the plain, logical arrangement of the Hebrew Text. The third vision, no less than the second, is the natural expansion of the first; and if all the three scenes are not to be collected in one, it is more appropriate to leave the first vision in a chapter by itself, and arrange the two supplementary pictures as the Hebrew Bible has done. In the vision among the myrtle-trees, the divine interposition was represented under a twofold aspect. It contained at once a threat of divine punishment against the nations, and a promise of divine blessing upon the distressed people of Jehovah. And as these

two correlated aspects shape themselves into independent visions, the dishorning of the nations (ii. 1–4) and the surveying and measuring of Jerusalem (ii. 5–17) is the result.

The dishorning of the nations is rightly taken first; for, in the estimation of the Jewish community, no blessing for Israel could be expected until the promised political upheaval was a fully realised fact. Hence the seer on the banks of the Kedron must again lift up his eyes, to catch the first glimpse of the coming *Weltkrisis*—that *dies irae* which was to be the sign of Israel's Messianic deliverance. And as he gazed and waited for the divine unveiling, the Kedron valley was again illumined by the weird-like symbolism of the night.

1. The Four Horns.

"And I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are

the horns which have scattered Judah and Israel"—omitting "Jerusalem" with various MSS. of the Septuagint.

In these horns we have a graphic delineation of the nations' *sin*. As represented in the first vision, the world-powers had helped forward Israel's affliction by visiting upon the subjugated states the barbarities of ancient warfare. Well may Zechariah use the intensive form of the verb, *to scatter*; for they had tossed and gored the vanquished nation like so many infuriated bulls. We sometimes speak of the barbarities of modern warfare, and heaven forbid that anyone should seek to minimise its horrors. But modern warfare is kindness itself when compared with the savage cruelties of a Sennacherib or a Nebuchadnezzar. Imagine the fiendish device of flaying men alive! or the inhuman practice of putting out a captive's eyes! or dragging away a batch of exiles with a hook in their nose! The Chaldean conqueror was not content with deporting the very flower of the nation, when Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C.

In pure savagery he slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah himself, bound him in fetters and carried him to Babylon (2 Kings xxv. 7). And in the day when these Chaldean strangers entered the city gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, Edom was as one of them. Instead of helping a brother in distress, the wild Edomite chiefs rejoiced over Israel's calamity, grasped at a share in the spoil, and lay in wait to cut off the fugitives (Obad. 11–14). This is the meaning of the number *four* as applied to the horns. The world-powers who had gored Israel in their fury, were not one enemy here and another there, but enemies who had arisen in all directions, and rushed in like the four winds to crush and trample her life-blood in the dust.

As a picture of this ferocious might, *the symbolism of the horn* leaves nothing to be desired. Beginning in early Semitic ritual as a relic or appendage of the altar—for in the last resort the horns on the altar point back to the actual heads of the

victims[1]—it became, in the development of society, a no less instructive symbol of kingly power (Ps. cxxxii. 17) or military strength, as when Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him "horns of iron," and said, "With these shalt thou push the Syrians until they be consumed" (1 Kings xxii. 11). Even Bacchus, when he descended to the realm of the shades, in order to bring back his mother Semele, had nothing to fear from the triple-tongued rage of Cerberus; for he appeared before that dreaded guardian of the infernal regions adorned with a golden horn (Horace, *Odes*, II. 19, 29). While, to complete the cycle, the student will remember how the imagery of the horn has expanded into the fabled *cornucopiæ* of the classics, until, like the horn of the goat which suckled Jupiter, it has been placed among the stars as the emblem of plenty. Sacrifice, strength, and plenty! Probably the lambs of the flock, if not the children of a larger growth, will be interested and instructed

[1] See the author's *Mosaic Tabernacle*, p. 69.

by the development of this expressive symbol.

In the present instance, the horn is the emblem of a ruthless and all-conquering might. It recalls the figure of "the notable horn" in the Book of Daniel. Moved with choler against the two-horned ram of Media and Persia, the rough goat ran upon him in the fury of his power, cast him down to the ground, and trampled upon him; and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand (viii. 7, 20). So it fared with Israel in the day of her calamity. The world-powers had smitten and torn her, as the first King of Greece would yet smite Persia. Like enraged animals they had lifted up the horn against Judah and Israel, and scattered the heritage of Jehovah among the heathen.

Judah and Israel! Does this mean that the old discord between the two kingdoms has at last been forgotten in the stress of a common calamity? Is this an indication that men learn in suffering, or in battle, the value of a mutual comradeship in the

attainment of a common ideal ? If so, one reason at least for the hard discipline of the Exile is not hard to discover. Jehovah had cast His sinful nation into the furnace of affliction that the pure metal of God's people might be separated from the dross. He chastised in order to purify : he fought that he might teach. The Babylonian Exile was not a colossal blunder. The unifying of their national ideal was well worth the discipline involved. They had come out of the furnace purified as silver and temperd as steel. Jehovah had made even the wrath of their enemies to work out their national good.

2. The Four Smiths.

" And the Lord shewed me four smiths. Then said I, What come these to do ? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which scattered Judah *and have broken Israel* (LXX), so that no man did lift up his head : but these are come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations, which

lifted up their horn against the land of Jehovah (LXX) to scatter it."

The symbolism of the nations' sin is here followed by the delineation of their *punishment.* Their personality is not emphasised. It is the character of their work, and not the nature of their persons, that absorbs the interest of the prophet. What come these to do ? is the inquiry that springs to his lips ; for, unlike the mounted scouts of Jehovah who appealed to him as angelic beings, the four smiths might be nothing more than human instruments, inaugurating and developing their plans along the line of history. The question of their identity is not pressed. We may think of them as four world-powers, like Nebuchadnezzar, who shattered the tyranny of Assyria, Cyrus, who broke down the pride of Babylon, Cambysis, who finally subdued the power of Egypt, and Alexander the Great, who in turn levelled the might of Media and Persia. Or we may limit the figure to the leaders of the people in Jerusalem—to Zerubbabel and Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah, who carried on

the work of consolidation and restoration in spite of the half-caste people of the land, who by intrigue and open resistance sought to hinder and interrupt the work. Or, in view of the fact that the four horns were referred, not to any special class of opponents, but to all the enemies of Israel without exception, the four smiths also may be interpreted in the same general way. We may think of them as the provision made by Israel's God for bringing to nought the world-wide oppression of His people, and for cowing and casting down all the adversaries and persecutors of His Church. In this wider view of the prophet's imagery, the identity of the agents may be allowed to pass into the background, and the whole attention of Zechariah and his hearers be concentrated on the character of the work.

The work, as already indicated, was the dishorning of the nations. This was Pressel's idea, as cited by C. H. H. Wright. A farmer suggested to him the true reason why smiths were specially alluded to. "When cattle," said the farmer, "are driven out to

pasture, the points of the oxen's horns are often cut off, in order that they may be no longer dangerous, and as one is obliged for this purpose to use a particularly sharp instrument, he has generally recourse to a smith." In other language, the intention of Jehovah was chastisement, not destruction. Even in the case of the great world-powers, he would humble, not annihilate, their pride. He would cast down the horn of their resentment, or withdraw the fangs of their envenomed opposition, that finding their place as innocuous and serviceable members of the community, they might realise the greatness of their national ideals in the common life of humanity.

Alas, that the wisdom and mercy of the divine intention should have been so frequently frustrated by human obduracy! Was it not so in the tragic fate of the heathen nations? Not only did they exceed their commission in the matter of helping forward the affliction of Israel, but even now, when they were to be included in a course of divine discipline—a discipline

which was designed to secure their highest national welfare, they refused to yield themselves to the hand of the divine Potter, and instead of rising to their true destiny in the approved comity of nations, they went down to future generations as a heap of shapeless mounds. And what of Israel? Did she bemoan the frustration of the divine ideal? Did she bewail the fact that instead of dishorning, destruction was to be the fate of the world-powers? Alas, for the answer! Stung by the memory of her age-long oppression, she was only too ready to catch up the strains of her much-maligned imprecatory paslms, and sing—

> O daughter of Babylon, that art to be destroyed:
> Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee
> As thou hast served us.
> Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones
> Against the rock. —Ps. cxxxvii. 8–9.

On the other hand, this is not to be regarded as the Judaism that hates humanity. It is only the natural reaction from the inhuman oppression to which they had

been too often subjected. We think of that long tale of horror which the world-conquerors had meted out to the vanished nation, and we do not marvel if the tossed and mangled community came to desire, not the dishorning of the oppressors, but the utter destruction of the bulls.

Still, the mere fact that the nations had exceeded the divine intention in the chastisement of Israel was no good reason why Israel, in turn, should go beyond the same divine plan in the subduing and humbling of the nations. The infinite mercy of Jehovah was sufficient for both. However imperfectly they realised it, it was true then, and it is true now, that

> There's a wideness in God's mercy
> Like the wideness of the sea;
> There's a kindness in His justice
> Which is more than liberty.
>
> But we make His love too narrow
> By false limits of our own;
> And we magnify His strictness
> With a zeal He will not own.

His design, both for Israel and the

nations, was altogether different. He was painting on the shifting screen of the future a golden age when all the ends of the earth would be one. He was working for the time, when not only one ancient discord would be left behind, but all discords; when not only Judah and Israel would dwell together in amity, but when, in the glowing idealism of Isaiah, Israel herself would be "a third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth" (Isa. xix. 24). But how was this ideal to be reached? Only in one way—not by destruction, but by *dishorning*; not by vindictive hate, but by reforming and forgiving love. Israel and all the nations must yield themselves as clay to the hand of the Master Potter, that He might fashion, beautify, and keep them, as vessels meet for His use.

Sad result! if through any intractability in the clay, the vessel should be marred in the Potter's hand. It was so by the rivers of Babylon, and among the ruins of Jerusalem. Shall it be so with us?

IV

THE MAN WITH THE MEASURING LINE

Chapter II. 5-17

(In Hebrew)

THE MAN WITH THE MEASURING LINE

The dishorning of the nations is now followed by the surveying and measuring of Jerusalem. For despite the ruined condition of her walls she was still the inheritance or portion of Jehovah in the holy land. In the expressive language of ver. 12 (Heb.) she was regarded as "the apple of His eye." What is seen in the eye of a man is not the image of the man himself, but the *babhah*, the tiny reflected image of the observer. And, in like manner, what was seen in Israel was not the nation as such, but the people of Jehovah in its ideality, bearing the image or far-off reflection of the Divine; and therefore worthy of being restored, beautified, and kept as the apple, the pupil, the *little man* (cf. Deut. xxxii. 10)

of his eye.[1] Obviously the humbling of the great world-powers was not sufficient : there must be the depiction of positive blessing for the sorely-distressed people of Jehovah.

1. The Present Necessity.

To say, with Orelli, that " there is not the slightest suggestion here of the rebuilding of the still ruined walls " is, to the present writer, in the highest degree unwarrantable. Whatever may have been the higher meanings suggested by the work of restoration, it was simply indispensable to the struggling Jewish community that the rebuilding of the city-walls should be faced forthwith. To be inhabited as villages without walls (ver. 8) would be, for a city like Jerusalem, not strength but weakness, not a blessing but a peril ; for so long as the Jewish capital remained unwalled, she was in perpetual fear of molestation, and openly exposed to the taunts and hostility of her continually active foes. Hence when Nehemiah finally completed the walls seventy-

[1] Cf. *Sermons in Syntax*, p. 70.

three years later, that redoubtable patriot, instead of regarding the building of the walls as outwith the scope of the divine intenion, added, "all the heathen that were about us feared, and were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work *was wrought of our God*" (Neh. vi. 16).

This, indeed, was Jerusalem's urgent necessity, and all the time that Zechariah was visiting the myrtle-grove he was fully cognisant of the fact. True, the building of the temple had to be undertaken first, for they had returned to Jerusalem as essentially a religious community: but the work of restoration could not rest there; it must go on, as occasion offered, until the whole city was fortified. And as the days came and passed the prophet had the satisfaction of seeing his earnest call to repentance beginning to bear fruit. The theodolite and chain were at last brought out into the open; and time and again, as he went to the grove of myrtles, he beheld the surveyors busily at work, taking measurements for the laying out of the

streets and walls and ascertaining what could be made of the ruins. This supplied him with the necessary imagery for his third midnight vision. "I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof and what is the length thereof. And behold the interpreting angel *was standing by* (cf. LXX)—as if in doubt regarding the significance of this action—but another angel (the angel of the Lord) went forth to meet him, and said, Run, speak to this young man, who so well represents the efforts of the youthful community, and tell him, not indeed to desist from his undertaking, but to realise the higher meanings suggested by the work of restoration."

Why commentators in general should have concluded that the angel was sent to prevent the young surveyor from carrying out his intention, we cannot profess to explain. There is nothing in the language itself to favour this interpretation; and in

view of Jerusalem's necessitous condition, surrounded as she was by powerful and unscrupulous foes, the idea, as thus expressed, is quite inadmissible. The angel was sent forth, not to prevent the young man from accomplishing his task, but to remind him of the greatness of Israel's spiritual ideal—not to tell him that his present project was altogether futile, but to show him that any reconstruction engaged in at that time was only the divine foreshadowing of a far more glorious destiny. The surveyor's task, indeed, could not thus be set aside. It was the one pressing necessity of the hour; and no dreams of a possible increase of population in the future could justify them in neglecting it. Every generation, it is true, has a clear duty towards the future, even though, as some retort, posterity has done nothing for us. Still, the present duty must always have the prior consideration; and to suggest that because of some problematic increase of population, municipal corporations, in any age, should provide not simply for the present necessity

but for future possibilities as well, is nothing better than the proverbial half-truth which is never independent of some necessary qualification. Former generations might have produced more ideal systems, and made fuller provision for later developments, both in sanitation, education and theology; but in so doing, what would have been left for us to perfect, or to bring into closer adjustment with modern requirements? Would not earlier idealism have necessarily implied diminished opportunity in the present? It may be the duty of the State to-day, let us say, to begin a scheme of afforestation for the sake of posterity; but that would not mean the mapping out of the entire area during the first year. If it be a national concern at all, it must be approached in a truly scientific spirit—not by mapping out the entire area at the outset, but by doing first things first, inserting the thin end of the wedge in a limited and even local experiment, and then allowing the project to expand and ripen with the growing demands and capabilities of the nation.

The situation at the founding of the second temple was precisely similar. Israel could well afford to peer into the future and think on the greatness of her coming destiny; but the present duty of the returned exiles was clear and urgent. It was not to arrest the youthful surveyor in his efforts to map out the city walls, but to begin at once the work of restoration, that having secured a firm footing in the land of their fathers, they might be ready for all eventualities.

2. The Future Ideal.

Zechariah, like a wise teacher, was intensely interested in the plans of the builders; but, at the same time, he tried to fire their imagination by emphasising the greatness of Israel's calling. As the people of Jehovah, she was destined to hand on to future ages, not a political economy, but a religion. She was summoned to hold aloft the torch of revelation, and thus fulfil the part of a great missionary people. Her ideal was not political, but religious. She was not an empire, but a Church.

This meant (*a*) that in this ideal city there was no need of walls; for, like everything spiritual, it was destined to be *world-wide*. It would overflow, not simply into the adjoining villages and annex the neighbouring towns, but sweep out in ever-increasing circles into other lands, and occupy and rule the entire heathen world. Nevertheless in this connection also the duty of Israel was to begin at the centre. Israel herself must first be blessed, before she could hope to become a blessing to all the ends of the earth. The Jews at home and their brethren in other countries must flock to the standard of Jehovah on Mount Zion, else never a heathen nation would be won for His service or help to swell the ranks of His loyal-hearted worshippers. This is the meaning of verses 10–11 (Heb.)—"Ho, Ho, flee from the land of the north (*i.e.* Chaldea), saith the Lord: for I will *gather* you (LXX) from the four winds of heaven, saith the Lord. Ho ye, escape *to Zion* (LXX), ye who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." Let no one say

that those who were still in Babylon turned a deaf ear to this appeal. When occasion offered they willingly sacrificed themselves for the prosperity and peace of Jerusalem. Not only did they contribute largely of their wealth when the first caravan set out under Zerubbabel and Joshua; but afterwards they furnished both the men and means for bringing the work in Jerusalem to a successful completion. Many of them were no more unmindful of the home and faith of their fathers than those who first crossed the desert in 537 B.C.

The urgency of the appeal, however, was peculiarly opportune at this juncture. Alike in the condition of unrest which prevailed in Babylon, and in the greatness of their own spiritual ideal, the Babylonian Jews had ample reason for reconsidering their position, and responding, before it was too late, to the urgent call of the homeland. In the opening years of Darius, for instance, Babylon herself was in imminent danger. Having made preparations for a lengthened siege within the city walls, she had openly

defied the Persian King, and hoped to wrest from his powerful grasp the coveted prize of her independence. But what could withstand the onset of the Persian troops! Speedily did Darius prove himself equal to every emergency: and Babylon, which had been very leniently dealt with at the hands of Cyrus, was made to bite the dust in the fury of his conquest. In the time of Zechariah, the atmosphere was charged with the electrical fluid of this coming storm; and therefore the summons addressed to the captive Jews that they should return to their own land, was peculiarly appropriate in the circumstances—"Ho, ye that dwell with the daughter of Babylon, escape ye to Zion."

For (*b*) their true national ideal was also *spiritual*. If the critical unrest of the times was one urgent reason why they should return to their own land, surely the higher claim of their moral and spiritual faith was indisputably another. Not in the land of the north, where they had been crushed by the spoiler, but in the

land and sanctuary of their fathers' God, would they find the opportunity and necessary fulcrum for the attainment of their world-wide ideal. To most of them, indeed, the land of their captivity was also the land of their nativity: but what was life-long association and personal ease to the unparalleled grandeur of their national faith? What was gain or social distinction to the insistent call of their God-appointed destiny? This was the voice of the nation as against the individual life. This was the appeal of the centuries as against the hours. Ho, ye inhabitants of the north, haste ye to Zion! Be an ensign, a lever, a divine signet, in the holy land.

Besides, was not Jehovah Himself the strongest pledge that their spiritual cause would ultimately triumph? Unlike the walls of Babylon which succumbed before Darius, or the walls of Jerusalem which would yet be demolished before the imperious might of Rome, the ramparts of the spiritual Zion could neither be scaled nor stormed; for Jehovah, the Lord of

Hosts, was as a wall of fire round about His people (cf. ver. 9). It is a most striking figure. God will not only make a hedge about them (Job i. 10), or walls and bulwarks which may be battered down (Isa. xxvi. 1), or high mountains, which may be got over (Ps. cxxv. 2) : he will be a wall of fire around them, which can neither be broken down nor undermined, but which will repel and overwhelm the assailants. Not more safe were the Bedouin shepherds when encircled by a ring of fires to scare off the beasts of prey by night, than were the people of Jehovah safe, even in the midst of their enemies, when surrounded and safeguarded by the holy fire of His love.

Hence in ver. 14 they are called upon to welcome His coming with a perfect jubilee of praise—" Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion ; for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord." Cf. similar invocations in Zeph. iii. 14–15, Isa. xii. 6 and liv. 1. The source of joy is sufficiently instructive : it is a fresh coming of Jehovah, Israel's God. Just as the early Christians

were inspired to nobler service by the promise of the Second Advent, so the Jews, at the founding of the second temple, are encouraged to rally round Zion by the hope of a speedy advent of Jehovah. Nay, the promised parousia was already begun. Jehovah had even then set forth from His heavenly abode (ver. 17), and a dreaded manifestation in judgment was about to break forth upon the world.

And what, under a concluding paragraph, was the real significance of this unveiling both for Israel and the nations? The answer is, that the *Weltkrisis* here depicted was to be a union of judgment and mercy. There was, at once, the might that crushes and appals, and the mercy that rescues and redeems. For when Jehovah appears in judgment, He but smites that He may save, and chastises that He may teach. In fine, the day of the Lord is to be a dishorning of the nations, not a destruction: it is chastisement, the proof of love. Consequently, while the angel of the Lord exclaims in ver. 13, "Behold,

I will shake mine hand over them, and they shall be a spoil to those that served them," he immediately adds in ver. 15, "And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be *his* people (LXX) . . . and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me." The coming of the Lord, on the one side, and the jubilation of God's people on the other, are to have this as their inspiring result. The dispersed of Israel among the nations, and the converted nations themselves, are to come up as one people to worship the Lord in Zion; and then the ideal of Israel, the covenant people of Jehovah, will be most gloriously realised. The Lord Himself will inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land (ver. 16), and Jerusalem once more will be chosen and kept as the apple of His eye. No more inspiring prospect could fill the mind or fire the imagination of any people. The building of the walls will at last have become an anachronism. "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; *for He is waked up out of His holy habitation.*"

V

THE PURIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

Chapter III

THE PURIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

When the first caravan set out in 537 B.C. the recognised leaders of the people were Zerubbabel and Joshua (Hag. i. 1). The secular and ecclesiastical rulers are found side by side; and yet, as Ibn Ezra so aptly observes, the prince is named before the priest, the son of Shealtiel has a distinct precedence over the son of Jehozadak. It may have been the design of their age-long discipline that they should return to their own land as a religious community; but the figment of a political ideal was not easily eradicated. It possessed so powerful an attraction for the popular imagination, that while the exiles came back greatly reduced in numbers and resources, they continued to cherish the

dream of a future restoration of the kingdom, and rejoiced in the thought that a scion of the house of David was still their leader and champion. But what of the prophet Zechariah? Was he, too, swayed and fascinated by this illusive will-o'-the-wisp? Wellhausen thinks that he was. "It is probable," he conjectures, "that the prophet designs to hint in a guarded way that Zerubbabel, who in all other places is mentioned along with Joshua, is on the point of ascending the throne of his ancestor David."[1] The answer to this is obvious. We have the clear teaching of chap. ii. If Zechariah taught them anything by means of his third midnight vision, he taught them the necessity of revising and reversing the order of this commonly-accepted estimate. Israel must learn to read not "prince and priest," but "priest and prince." For, as Wellhausen himself has pointed out in his article "Pentateuch" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the high priest in the second temple was not only

[1] *Biblica*, col. 5392.

the head of the natural worship, he was "the head of the entire national life." And the spirituality of this ideal was not to be imperilled by any unreasoned action in the present. There was the risk of possible complications with Persia, through the unguarded expression of their national hopes. There was also the danger of depreciating and discrediting their spiritual functions, because of undue prominence given to the secular. And, finally, there was the moral certainty of still further estranging their fathers' God, and the subsequent difficulty of appeasing or placating His favour. Surely all this enforced the wisdom of learning to put first things first, and of placing well in the foreground, not their political, but their religious ideal as the covenant people of Jehovah. It is in this order, at least, that the prophet proceeds now to deal with their present spiritual perplexities. Before he comes to Zerubbabel, and treats of their feebleness as a community (chap. iv.), he describes the condition of the priesthood

(chap. iii.), and their admitted sinfulness as a Church.

1. Rescued as a Brand.

"And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary. And the angel of the Lord (so Kittel) said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord, that is *choosing* (participle) Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (verses 1–2).

In these verses we have the prophetic delineation of the covenant people themselves. For in the words of Kliefoth (as quoted by Keil), "the priesthood of Israel was concentrated in the high priest just as the character of Israel as the holy nation was concentrated in the priesthood." It is not Joshua, as such, who is impeached before the divine tribunal, but Joshua as the ecclesiastical representative of a sinful and guilt-laden people. And the people themselves felt this. In the last resort, the

charges brought by Satan against the sacerdotal ruler are but the pictorial representation of Israel's own sense of sin. And psychologically the rise of this moral consciousness is not difficult to follow. It began with the soul-subduing vision of Israel's spiritual destiny. The very impressiveness of the picture, sketched by Zechariah in the previous chapter, has filled them with the guilty fear of a possible divine estrangement. The sense of demerit is always proportionate to the consciousness of blessing despised. And since they have been led for a moment to behold the heights to which they had been summoned to rise, they have been led by the same impulse to peer into the depths to which they had allowed themselves to sink. Alas, neither they nor their priests had been worthy of the greatness of their ideal. They had violated the law and profaned the sanctuary of their God (cf. Ezek. xxii. 26); and who could wonder, if on the threshold of His restored temple, the unworthy and guilt-laden community should be rejected?

This was a fear, indeed, which could not be suppressed. It forced its way upwards to the ear and bar of the Eternal; and finding there a suitable expression in the impeachment of the great accuser, it demanded with all the sophistry of a malignant imputation the total rejection of the people. Because of Israel's long-continued and ineradicable sin, let the whole nation be treated as a brand fit for the fire.

But what is the reply of the angel of the Lord? It is at once a complete refutation of the vindictive charge, and a stern silencing of the one who brought it. "The *Lord Himself* rebuke thee, O Satan (note the emphatic Paseq introduced by Baer after the term 'Jehovah'); yea, the Lord who *is choosing* (the present participle indicating the duration or continuity of the divine action) Jerusalem, rebuke thee; is not *this*[1] a brand plucked out of the fire?" The same figure is used in Amos iv. 11,

[1] Wickes regards the double Mer'kha on this word as "an irregular and unmeaning accentuation," but see the author's remarks on Hab. i. 3 in *Sermons in Accents*, p. 55.

where with a distinct allusion to the terrible throes of earthquake, the grandees of Samaria are reminded that the refugees from that appalling disaster were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning. In the present instance, it is the exile and not the earthquake which is at the basis of the prophet's description. On the plains of Babylonia the Jewish captives had been cast as into a burning fiery furnace, and there the malicious accuser of the brethren would fain have left them as they were. But Jehovah who had chosen Israel at the first, and who had again returned in mercy to the object of His choice, realised the value of the half-burnt piece of wood, and graciously snatched it out of the fire. And on the basis of this redemptive and completed act, how could anyone listen to the vindictive and reckless plea that the scorched and blackened bit of timber should again be consigned to the flames? No, "the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance." Israel, the sinful nation, had been forgiven much; and this, the first

step in her full restoration, could never be revoked. If a restored people, like a renewed soul, be rescued by a miracle of grace, it shall never be left as the prey of the great accuser. Let this be written for the comfort of the Church in all ages: the rescued one is "a brand *plucked out* of the fire."

2. Installed as a Priest.

"And Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the angel of the Lord. And the angel said unto those that stood before him, Take the filthy garments from off him—And unto him he said (as in a gracious undertone), Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee—and clothe him with robes flowing down to the feet, and set a fair mitre upon his head (omitting the verb 'I said' at the beginning of ver. 5, and translating both verbs as imperatives with the LXX). So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments; and the angel of the Lord stood by."

This is the second stage in Israel's re-

storation. Deliverance from destruction is now to be followed by worship and service. And yet was even the head of the priestly nation worthy to appear before Jehovah? No doubt they had been delivered from the Babylonian captivity, and brought back to their own land, and to that extent they could justly confide in the Divine mercy. But to draw near as priests within the sphere of the divine sanctity was another and very different matter! Were they fit to approach the altar of incense in the robes of glory and beauty, enumerated in Ex. xxix. 5–6, or to appear in the dress of pure white linen prescribed for the great day of atonement (Lev. xvi. 4)? Little marvel if the revived consciousness of the people faltered at the prospect, or trembled at the thought of their unfitness for the perfect exercise of their calling. They had faith, indeed, to be saved; but had they faith also for this spiritual service? Alas, for the reality. Instead of the variegated robes of Aaron and his sons, they were dressed in the filthy garments of a nation's

unaccountable folly. The sordidness of their aims had raised up an impassable barrier between them and the golden altar. They were not fit to enter as priests into the holy place. Nevertheless, their hope was in Jehovah, Israel's God. In the striking parenthesis introduced into ver. 4 (accompanied, no doubt, by a dramatic change of tone), the angel of the Lord turned to Joshua, and said, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee"; and as a symbolical representation of its removal, he was to listen to the angel's instructions to those who were standing by. Addressing these attending ministers, he continued, "Remove the squalid garments from off him—garments which so vividly portray the nation's sense of sin; and clothe him in those robes of glory and beauty, which no less fitly symbolise his acceptance as a priest." And the attending angels did so. They clothed him with garments down to the feet, and set a fair mitre upon his head, and the angel of the Lord stood by. The guilty fears of the people were shown to

be entirely groundless; and because they were, Israel must now listen to the solemn teaching which follows, that the symbolical change of raiment having been effected, the sacrament of investiture must be vindicated and crowned by the unswerving loyalty of obedience. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then *thou also* shalt judge my house, and shalt *also* keep my courts (the emphatic pronoun 'thou,' and the repeated adverb 'also' being a sufficient justification for beginning the apodosis at this point), and I will give thee a place of access (R.V.) among them that stand by." Instead of being treated as an outcast, Joshua is to be admitted freely into the divine presence as the people's representative. If installation is followed by obedience, obedience, in turn, will be rewarded by communion with the divine. And in that freedom of access among those who encircled God's throne, the spiritual ideal of Israel would itself be crowned. In fine, Israel, the people of Jehovah, is

graciously accepted as a reinvested kingdom of priests. The filthy garments have been laid aside for the rich apparel of the King.

3. Honoured as a Type.

"Hear now, O Joshua, the high priest, thou and thy colleagues that sit before thee (*i.e.* the priestly conclaves); for they are men *which are a sign*; for behold I will bring forth my servant the Branch" (ver. 8). Baffled by the failures of the past, and grieved by the sordidness of the present, does the prophet suggest in these concluding verses that for a complete reaffirming of Israel's faith, the leaders must have recourse to the shifting screen of the future? If so, he never possessed a more suitable starting-point for his Messianic vaticination than in the spiritual functions, but also the confessed limitations of Israel's reinstated priests. If they failed in realising fully the greatness of their spiritual calling, they could at least point forward to One who in the glory of Israel's golden age would give a perfect realisation to that transcendent

hope. Hence the greatest thing that could be said of Joshua and his priestly colleagues was that they were a type or portent of the coming Messianic fulfilment. They were not merely a *wonderful* illustration of Jehovah's saving grace (A.V.), or men who could interpret marvels, like the soothsayers of ancient times (LXX); they were also types or symbols of the long-promised Messianic ideal; and therefore a definite ground of assurance for Israel's undying hope.

The hope itself is vividly depicted in verses 8[b]–9. It is at once a living *shoot* that springs up out of obscurity into wide-spreading luxuriance; and an equally significant *stone*, which, brought out and adorned by the Master Builder, will yet ensure the erection and ultimate completion of the temple. The figure of the "Branch," which appears as a proper name in Zech. vi. 12, is already familiar from passages like Jer. xxiii. 5, xxxiii. 15, Isa. iv. 2, xi. 1; and even the profoundly solemn oracle in Deutero-Isaiah, where the ideal Servant

of Jehovah is represented as "a root out of a dry ground," with no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that we should desire him (Isa. liii. 2). Thus humbly and obscurely would the coming Messiah appear as a branch; but, unlike the charred brand fit only for the fire, He would grow and flourish like the goodly cedar, until its benign shadow would fill the land. The services of Joshua and his colleagues might be restricted in various ways—both by the earthliness of their aims and by the local character of their sanctuary—but who could set any bounds to the priesthood of God's servant the Branch? He would appear in the power of an endless life, and sacrifice and intercede for all. Here, indeed, was a hope that might well fill the people of Jehovah with a fully assured faith. In the greatness and glory of the Messianic fulfilment their profound spiritual ideal would be verified.

But what of the urgency of their present national distress? This suggested the companion picture of a "stone," which having

been set before Joshua, the high priest, was to ensure the ultimate completion and adequate adornment of the Jewish temple. "Behold the stone that I have set before Joshua; upon that one stone shall be directed seven eyes—the seven eyes which symbolise the universal providence and care of Jehovah (cf. iv. 10)—and behold whatever decoration be necessary in order to fit the stone for its place at the corner or capital, I myself will engrave the engraving thereof; until when it is finally placed in position, and the Messianic temple has become a completed fact, I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." In a word, the ideal temple, like the ideal Jerusalem, will be a house of prayer for all nations; and the luxuriance of my Servant the Branch will throw its welcome shadow over the whole. Then, indeed, the ultimate goal of Old Testament pedagogy will be reached; each man will sit under his vine and under his fig-tree, and invite his neighbour to come and share in the blessings of an enduring peace.

VI

THE UPBUILDING OF THE COMMUNITY

Chapter IV.

THE UPBUILDING OF THE COMMUNITY

This naturally follows the restoration and purification of the Church. Joshua, their ecclesiastical ruler, has been installed into office; and now a suitable message has to be prepared and conveyed to their civil head, Zerubbabel. This is the meaning of Zech. iv. In most communities the distinction between the two spheres is easily defined and appreciated, and no serious difficulty is experiened in specifying the functions of each. But in Israel's case, the two offices were so closely allied, and the religious factor so strongly accentuated as in chap. iii., that the prophet must have felt it a delicate task, not simply to hold the balance between them, but to find any place in his ideal kingdom for the person and work of Zerubbabel. The delicacy

of this problem, and not any spiritual exhaustion produced by the preceding visions, is sufficient to account for the significant pause observable in ver. 1. He had lingered so long in the grove of myrtles trying to reconcile these conflicting interests, that a considerable interval elapsed before he was able to throw into shape his fully-matured convictions. And when the truth did dawn upon his mind with all the force of a divine illumination, he could only liken it to a return of his angel interpreter, and a spirit-taught awakening out of sleep. "The angel that talked with me came again, and waked me; as a man that *is waked* (daily [1]) out of sleep."

1. The Re-emphasising of Israel's Spiritual Calling.

The message to Zerubbabel can only begin with a re-affirming of Israel's spiritual

[1] The frequentative imperfect denotes the repeated experience of a man, and is quite distinct from the single, completed action depicted by the perfect in chap. ii. 17 (Heb.).

calling. "He said unto me, What seest thou (cf. Jer. i. 12)? And I said, I see, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with *a* bowl (LXX) upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon; and seven pipes to the lamps which are upon it (omitting the first 'seven' with the LXX); and two olive trees by it, one upon *its* right side (Kittel) and the other upon its left. And I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, lord? Then the angel that talked with me, said . . . This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by martial force (*Heersmacht*, Orelli) nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

One can have no hesitation in saying that this is a perfect picture of Israel's spiritual ideal. The seven-branched candlestick is an expressive symbol of the holy nation engaged in priestly service. She had been chosen of God to reflect His praise and to illumine the surrounding darkness, until, all darkness being scattered, the whole

earth would become a tabernacle filled with heaven's own light. Her election, therefore, did not mean the rejection of others. Why should the shutting in of some be the means of shutting others out? This is not the meaning of election in any age. It was election to *serve*, and the very idea of service implied that the others could be served. Instead of leading the way to a Judaism that hated humanity, divine revelation was ever seeking to utter the words :—" Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples " (Isa. lvi. 7). And thus the priestly nation, having been bathed in the laver of purification (chap. iii.), was now summoned by the symbolism of the golden candlestick to enter into the service of Jehovah, and hold aloft the torch of truth among the surrounding nations.

Election and *inspiration*—this is the teaching of the *oil*. The candlestick had to be fed continually with " pure olive oil beaten "—that is, oil prepared in the way which yielded the whitest, purest light by beating the unripe, green olives in a mortar

(Ex. xxvii. 20). And this, as all expositors agree, is a suggestive symbol of the divine spirit. "It is not by might nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." This is the application of the figure made in Zechariah's vision, when the attending angel interpreted the two olive trees that stood beside the golden lampstand, and fed it perpetually with consecrated oil. The light which Israel was to give back in service was first of all divinely supplied by inspiration. The shining was dependent on the anointing. No one was sent a warring on his own charges. The calling was supplemented by the chrism of a divine endowment.

In the light of this higher teaching what was the duty of every true patriot in Jerusalem? Was it not to conserve the sanctity, and enforce the spirituality of Israel's high calling? Israel's ideal, as already noted, was not political, but religious. She was not an empire, but a Church. Hence if the leaders in general, or Zerubbabel in particular, were cherishing any secular ambitions in connection with the restoration

of Jerusalem, the sooner they surrendered this illusive dream, and found their supreme concern in the higher interests of religion, the sooner would they gain a firm footing in the holy land, and rise to their destined place in the approved comity of nations. It was the lack of this which had proved Israel's snare in the past. The dream of a political supremacy, or the hope of holding their own amid the clash of empires, had ever been the *ignis fatuus* which allured their fathers to their doom. Both Ephraim and Judah had become joined to these idols; and therefore, first in Samaria, and then in Jerusalem, they had the downfall of the State. It had been a ruinous policy from first to last; and if the old folly was not to be repeated in the times of the second temple, the solemn teaching given to Zerubbabel must be laid seriously to heart, that it was not by martial force or political ascendency that Israel was to rise to future greatness, but by absolute devotion to the spirit of the theocracy which alone could make her a burning and a shining lamp

—a divine lampstand, replenished not by anything human, but by the perennial and inexhaustible supplies of God's covenant mercy. It was a sacred calling—one far beyond the sparks of Israel's own kindling. The torch that was to lighten the world must be lit at the altar of God. She required an unction from the Holy One.

2. The Part Played by Zerubbabel.

According to the present vision the rôle of the civil ruler was to be confined to the erection of the temple. Instead of being directed to the founding and strengthening of a State, he was summoned to support the leaders of the sacerdotal order in their efforts to reorganise the worship. And if he did so with devotion—resisting the temptation to bring Israel into an independent position by consolidating her external power—he was promised that the difficulties which had lain so long in the way of the temple restoration would be removed out of his path—levelled by the

command and divine assistance of Jehovah, Israel's God. Every high hill would be brought low. This is the teaching of verses 7–10, which may be paraphrased as follows :—" That great mountain which stands before Zerubbabel *I will set* as a plain (Kittel's emendation) ; and he shall bring forth the headstone amid the acclamations and prayers of the people. For thus saith the Lord, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands shall finish (it) ; and despite the gloomy forebodings of some who bemoan the insignificance of its beginning, the seven eyes of Jehovah shall see with joy the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel, and mark with approbation the dedicatory services connected with that auspicious day. And if even divine Omniscience thus approve of the temple dedication, who can presume to depreciate or ridicule the work ? "

Did the old men who moved about among the rising walls of the temple affect to despise it ? Did they help to discourage

the hearts of the builders by dwelling upon the dimensions of the former sanctuary, and peevishly suggest that the present building was as nothing in their eyes (Hag. ii. 3)? The disparagement was utterly inexcusable. It had only the semblance of validity, if one was prepared to ignore the greatness of Israel's spiritual ideal. Viewed in the light of that higher teaching, the complaint was not worthy of those who sought to keep in touch with present necessities, and who were still capable of being thrilled with the buoyancy of a spirit-taught hope. To men who had caught a glimpse of Israel's future—and surely Zerubbabel would try to be one of them—its comparatively insignificant beginning did not appear as a day of small things; for even now, in the light of their spiritual destiny, it was big with the promise of what might yet be. It was not unlike the bursting of the seed in springtime. Anyone may stand priestlike beside the opening bud, and say, "It doth not yet appear what it shall be"; for rolled up in

its tiny folds, as in a cradle, is the germinal principle of animation, and this is endowed with the mysterious property and potency of growth. Massive and inert may be the weight of brown earth through which the tender blade has to push its way upwards in the spring; but the slender spike of green is a living thing, and we cannot afford to despise the feebleness of its origin; for it will yet help to cover the entire field with the fulness and glory of harvest.

Besides, the part played by Zerubbabel is not to be exhausted by the temple dedication. Faithfulness at the present juncture will be rewarded and crowned by an ever-increasing service in the future. He, too, will be accepted as a man of "portent." The prince, no less than the priest, is a type of the coming "Branch." In truth, the completion of the temple is only an august beginning. It will be succeeded, in due course, by the erection of the city walls. And these, in turn, will sweep out into that ideal kingdom depicted in chap. ii. 8 (Heb.), when Jerusalem will be

inhabited as villages without walls, and when royalty, no less than priesthood, will prepare the way for the Messianic fulfilment, and usher in God's Servant, the Branch, who is both King and Priest. Is this not the precise teaching of verses 11–14? "Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick, and upon the left side thereof? And (not waiting for an answer) I asked the second time, saying, What be these two olive branches (or, *tufts*, from which the oil flows into the bowl, Orelli) which by means of the two golden spouts (or, *beaks*, LXX) empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me, and said . . . These are the two sons of oil (R.V.) that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." In other language, the two olive *trees* are the two offices of kingship and priesthood, instituted in Israel by the chrism of a divine anointing; and the two *tufts*, which empty the golden oil into the bowl, are the two representatives of these offices, viz., Zerubbabel and Joshua—the

whole symbolism being well designed to teach Israel that so long as her civil and religious affairs were administered with discretion, so long would Jehovah enable them, through these appointed channels, not only to triumph over their present difficulties, but to shine as a lamp among the surrounding nations, and usher in the greatness and glory of the Messianic age. Zerubbabel is not set before Joshua, and still less is Joshua set before Zerubbabel. They are placed on a footing of perfect equality beside the Lord of the whole earth, and the conflicting interests connected with the two offices are most happily reconciled. The one leader may simply use the trowel in the furtherance of Israel's cause, while the other uses the censer and sprinkles the sacrificial blood; but if a similar spirit of devotion be found behind the two actions, the services of the two representatives will be divinely equalised. Only let Zerubbabel do his part well in helping to reorganise the worship, and both his official position and personal

service will be duly recognised and acknowledged. There is no distinction between secular and sacred in the spiritual ideal of Israel. The divine spirit of the theocracy may be equally honoured in both; and "those that honour Me, I will honour."

3. The Meaning of the Vision for Us.

Instead of being weakened or eclipsed by the greatness of the Messianic fulfilment, it has only been illumined and intensified by being "baptized into Christ." There is (1) the lesson of the divine fulness of blessing as symbolised by the *oil*. The two olive trees which stood beside the golden lampstand were the type of a perennial and inexhaustible supply. There was no need, as in the Mosaic tabernacle, to replenish daily the exhausted lamps, or to prepare the oil according to divine prescription, so as to secure the highest degree of excellence in the light. Human agency in this respect was not introduced at all. The two living trees produced by

themselves an abundant and unfailing supply, and by means of the two golden spouts which communicated with the bowl upon the lampstand, they fed the seven lamps with a continuous stream of oil, which was the type of Israel's fulness of blessing received from Jehovah. And that divine fulness is intended for us. In the God of Israel there is a sufficiency of grace and goodness for all His creatures. No one is asked to remove mountains in his own strength. No one is expected to shine like a lamp in the sparks of his own kindling. No one is under any necessity of preparing the oil or creating a holy spirit for himself. "If ye know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?" That spirit presses everywhere like the air we breathe. It is the very breath of God touching the soul. And when, like the incoming tide, it fills every crevice and fissure along the shore, the individual life, instead of being impoverished and weak, is filled unto all "the fulness of God."

But, again (2), we have the *channels* through which the consecrated oil had to be conveyed. It was conveyed by means of the two sons of oil who stood by the Lord of the whole earth. And these two sons of oil, or the representatives of royalty and priesthood, are, as most expositors admit, fitly taken up and fulfilled in the great Antitype, who was at once King and Priest. Through the kingly and priestly offices of Christ we have the one mediatorial channel through which the holy anointing oil is conveyed to man. And thus we have the mystic teaching of all the New Testament writers, that the gifts and graces of the divine spirit are brought near to us *in* and *through Him*. It is only as we keep ourselves in vital contact with Christ that we enter, in any measure, into the divine fulness of grace, holiness, and comfort, which are represented to us in the golden lampstand. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also *with Him* freely give us all things?" No Zerubbabel in the church

to-day has profited as he might have done by the teaching of the golden candlestick, who has not sought pardon and life, fitness and power to shine, through the royal and priestly functions of God's divine Son.

For (3) all this is necessary in view of the spirituality of Israel's ideal. That ideal is equally incumbent on us. "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9). There are both election and endowment in the priesthood of Christian men—election to serve, and endowment of the Holy Ghost—and both derived from Him who walks amidst the seven golden candlesticks and holds the seven stars in His right hand (Rev. i. 13). Elected to serve, perhaps to suffer, certainly to *shine*—to shine like stars in the darkness of midnight when no eye sees but God's. Who is sufficient for this service? No one who trusts in his own wisdom, and is blind to

the forces that are divine. It is not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. The lampstand that is to illumine the tabernacle of the world must be lit at the altar of God. We, too, need an unction from the Holy One.

VII

THE CLEANSING OF THE LAND

Chapter V.

THE CLEANSING OF THE LAND

In the preceding sections the prophet has dealt with the leaders of the community. He removed at once the guilty fears of the one and the political aspirations of the other, by portraying Joshua and Zerubbabel as the two sons of oil that stand by the Lord of the whole earth. Political aspirations, however, were not by any means the only weakness which he had to expose. As he betook himself, time after time, to the grove of myrtles, he was painfully conscious of being confronted by another. Throughout the entire community he could feel the benumbing influence of the mercenary spirit of the times. Probably a growing reluctance on the part of some to pay the temple dues had brought the matter to a crisis : and Zechariah had the mortification of learning that not a few who dwelt in

their own "cieled houses" (Hag. i. 4) were among the first to perpetrate the fraud. Here, indeed, was a recrudescence of the age-long evil depicted by Zephaniah, when through absorbing attention to secular business (i. 11) the people were sinking into religious indifference, or becoming "settled upon their lees" (ver. 12)—a moral apathy which was sure to degenerate into practical infidelity or the unbelief which says, "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." But what availed the higher ideals impressed upon the leaders, if the people themselves were in danger of sinking into a moral apathy like this? What if the people of Jehovah had become so engrossed in secular pursuits that they were gradually losing all interest in, and love for, the sanctuary and faith of their fathers? Would the higher aspirations of the leaders absolve or save them? No, the spirituality of the ideal must be reflected in civic justice and commercial integrity, else the doom pronounced by Amos (chap. viii.) would go

forth as a swift curse, and alight upon the ungodly nation after all. This is the new aspect of the subject which appeals to Zechariah in this passage; and in the double-vision recorded in these paragraphs, we have the spirit-taught message with which he was commissioned to go to the people.

1. A Flying Roll.

"Then, again, I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold a flying roll (LXX 'sickle'). And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole *land* (R.V.); for every one that stealeth shall be purged out *as many as they are* (cf. vii. 3), and every one that sweareth shall be purged out as many as they are. I have (perfect) caused it to go forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of

him that sweareth falsely by My name: and it shall abide in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof" (vers. 1–4).

As compared with the personal note in this section, some may prefer to deal with evil in the abstract. Drunkenness, vice, oppression, fraud, or any other social evil ought to be condemned in the most withering terms of invective; but who would care to approach and pillory the transgressor himself, and say "Thou art the man"? Why, the individual offender may have been the merest toy in the grip of circumstances. Heredity, environment, commercial competition, and what not, may all have entered as determining and therefore extenuating factors: and when these and similar facts have been duly weighed and discounted, the sin, it is true, may still be deserving of public scorn, but the individual delinquent, as the case may be, ought to be pitied rather than blamed. Hebrew prophecy, as might have been

expected, had no such timidity or false delicacy. The sin of theft or of perjury might be reprehensible enough, and call forth the censure of all true patriots and preachers, but they never failed to begin with the person of the wrong-doer, and to pronounce God's righteous judgment on the guilty. Notwithstanding every extenuating circumstance, man is "man and master of his fate," and ought to be judged and treated accordingly. Hence if any one went forth, like Achan, and appropriated part of the spoils which had been placed under a divine taboo, it was not enough that the captain of the army should denounce the sacrilege that had wrought such folly in Israel: he must institute also a searching inquiry for the detection and punishment of the criminal, that both he and his ill-gotten gains might be expelled from the camp. In a similar manner, when Zechariah would stigmatise the deceit that tampered with the temple dues, or characterise the judgment that was sure to tread upon its heels, he could

only liken it to a flying roll or a swiftly moving curse, which would overtake both thieves and perjurers, and overwhelm them in a common doom. They might cheat and defraud the sanctuary if they dared, but the retribution pronounced upon all such duplicity would assuredly come home to roost. It would come and lodge in the house of each culpable transgressor, and, like dry-rot fastening upon the timber, it would lay the whole fabric in ruins.

The entire house! *i.e.* timber and stone alike, or as one might say, *mit Haut und Haaren* (Wellhausen); for the destruction of the tent or house was an old form of punishment, signifying the expulsion of the entire family from the camp or village. Nothing would escape the blighting influence of the curse. Like a flying eagle it was ready to swoop upon the prey, and the whole household of the perjured person would become its carrion. Dr. Dods has finely illustrated this aspect of the subject by the story of Glaucus in Herodotus. Having received a deposit of

money in trust, he wished to appropriate it for his own use; and came to the oracle at Delphi to enquire if he might take an oath that he had never received it. The following was the answer:—

"Best for the present it were, O Glaucus, to do as thou wishest,
Swearing an oath to prevail, and so to make prize of the money,
Swear then—death is the lot even of those who never swear falsely.
Yet hath the Oath-God a Son, nameless, footless and handless:
Mighty in strength He approaches to vengeance, and whelms in destruction
All who belong to the race, or the house of the man who is perjured."

And yet in the light of Israel's spiritual ideal what is the ultimate design of all such punishment? Not surely the mere destruction of the guilty, as if the satisfying of divine justice were the only incentive suggested by the flying roll. The end in view is something far more worthy of a divine moral government. It is the moulding and purifying of the whole community

that it might be rendered fit for the perfect exercise of its calling. If Achan perished in the valley of Achor because of his trespass in the devoted thing, Israel whom he had troubled in the presence of her enemies was exonerated from the baleful influence of the ban. And if Zechariah, in turn, is assured that the same method is to be adopted in his age, he knows that the extermination of the thieves and false swearers is designed to bring the chosen people one step nearer to the greatness of their calling—disciplined into purity and inspired for a more perfect service. This surely was an ideal that was worth the discipline of obedience: and if any one was so mercenary in spirit, or unspiritual in outlook, as to refuse to acquiesce in the refining process, little wonder if, for the sake of that diviner vision, the earthly soul should be removed out of the way. The prohibition of the accursed thing was designed for Israel's good; but if disobedience to the higher teaching had changed the blessing into a ban, then he

who coveted the spoils of war and hid them within his tent, had simply to be expelled. That the sin, however, no less than the sinner was duly anathematised in Israel is obvious from the section that follows :—

2. A Deported Ephah.

"Then the angel that talked with me appeared, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see the bushel which there comes into view (so Wellhausen). And I said, What is it? And he said, This is their *transgression* (LXX) in the whole land: and behold a circlet of lead was lifted up, and a woman was sitting in the ephah. And he said, This is Wickedness: and he cast her down into the midst of the ephah, and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold there came forth two women, and the wind was in their wings: now they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah

between the earth and the heaven. Then said I . . . Whither do these bear the ephah ? And he said unto me, To build her an house in the land of Shinar : and when it is prepared, she shall be set there in her own place " (vers. 6–11).

A deported ephah ! truly a most significant symbol, whether we think of its form, its contents, or its destination. The measure, in itself, was eloquent with meaning as to the kind of evil that was threatening to secularise the people. Did they possess an ephah for the setting forth of wheat immediately after the passing of the Sabbath ? So had Jehovah, Israel's God, for setting forth the character and value of their actions. And if they were tempted to make the ephah small and the shekel great, and to deal falsely with the balances of deceit (cf. Amos viii. 5) let them never forget that the Great Husbandman was fully aware of their duplicity, and was even now weighing and measuring it, and placing it to their account. It was not unlike the imagery of the bow. What though the

wicked had bent *their* bow, and made ready the arrow upon the string, that they might shoot privily at the upright in heart (Ps. xi. 2)? There was Another who had bent *His* bow long before them. God is a righteous judge, yea, a God that hath indignation every day. If a man turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow and made it ready (Ps. vii. 12). And what will happen when all this divine preparation blazes into action? Ah, let those who are prepared to grow rich by violence and robbery—by dishonest trading, false weights and worthless goods—tremble at the thought that He whose punitive energy is about to burst forth, has accurately weighed all their practices and motives in *His* ephah.

For the *contents* of this divine symbol are even more arresting than its form. It is filled (symbolically) with the accumulated mass of the nation's sin. "This is their *transgression* in the whole land." It is the sum of all their theft and perjury, fraud and impiety, which would defy, desecrate

and destroy both tables of the law. Is it represented as a woman—"full-grown, seductive, plotting, prolific" (Dods); and therefore ready to sweep out and infect and poison the whole land? All the more need that it should be thrust back into the midst of the ephah, and that the heavy weight of lead, which had been raised for a moment, should again be pressed firmly upon its mouth. This was wickedness—restless, defiant, insidious—a moral miasma capable of poisoning the entire national life; and therefore fit only to be expelled from the country, lifted up between heaven and earth, and deported into another land.

This raised the question of its *destination.* On outstretched wings, as if they were the wings of a stork (at the time of its migration), two celestial genii soared aloft on the breeze, and bore the sin-bushel between them. And when the prophet inquired, "Whither do they bear the ephah?" he was informed that, like the scapegoat led away into the wilderness, and carrying Israel's sin to the desert-demon Azazel (Lev. xvi. 10),

so the deported ephah would find a home in the marshlands of the Euphrates where the boom of the bittern and the multiplied cry of the raven would bid it welcome. Away in that land of primeval impiety (Gen. xi. 4) and dishonoured commerce (Ezek. xvii. 4) the peculiarly heinous sins of arrogance, injustice and fraud would find a congenial home, and would no longer defile or plague the heritage of Jehovah. In fine, like another King Arthur, the broad-winged genii had successfully accomplished their task. Both by flying roll and deported ephah, they had

> "Cleared the dark places and let in the law,
> And broke the bandit's holds, and cleansed the land."

And they had done so, chiefly, in the light of Israel's *ideal*. This is the final norm or test of all prophetic teaching. Commerce, no less than politics, and social reform, no less than worship, must be lifted out of the arena of self-interest altogether, and brought within the sweep of Israel's spiritual destiny. Prince or peasant, lay-

man or priest, merchant or builder, shepherd or metal-worker, must all live and work,

"As ever in the great Task-master's eye,"

else the Kingdom of God, as a kingdom of righteousness and peace, will never be seen in the earth. Is this not the teaching of all the generations? "I, standing at the brink of the grave, cannot keep silent," writes Tolstoy, in the *Fortnightly Review* for March 1909; and the picture he has drawn of the ever-increasing wretchedness of the world is simply appalling. "The majority of working people, deprived of land, and therefore the possibility of enjoying the products of their labour, hate the landowners and capitalists who enslave them. The landowners and capitalists, aware of the attitude of the working classes toward them, fear and hate them, and by the aid of force, organised by government, keep them enslaved. And steadily and increasingly the position of the workers grows worse, their dependence on the rich increases; and equally steadily and unceas-

ingly the wealth of the rich and their power over the workers increase, together with their fear and hatred." It is a dark picture; and what, according to this modern Zechariah, is the one remedy for this state of wretchedness? *Loyalty to the ideal.* "The means of escape . . . lies in the inhabitants of the Christian world adopting the highest understanding of life . . . which is the Christian teaching in its real meaning." "The Christian teaching in its full and true meaning is that the essential thing in human life, and the highest law that can guide it, is *love*." "And acknowledging the law of love to be supreme, and its application in life to be exempt from any exceptions, it cannot but reject all violence, and consequently the world's whole organisation which is founded on violence."

Zechariah in the ancient world, and now one like Tolstoy in the modern, has no other message save this. He can only put the trumpet to his lips, and summon the whole Christian world to the glory of forgotten

ideals. The land or the Church, society or the individual life, can be cleansed in no other way. Each man must be loyal to the supremacy of Christian love, and walk in the paths of righteousness. Either this or an ignominy too awful to contemplate. He who will not help to deport the sin-ephah must face the flying roll!

VIII

THE JUSTIFICATION OF PROVIDENCE

Chapter VI.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF PROVIDENCE

We now come to the last of the present series of visions, and instinctively hark back to the first. Logically, it may be, the prophet had no other way of finishing his subject: he must complete the cycle of his thinking by reviewing and recasting the whole. Hence the symbolism of chap. i. 7–17 is repeated in chap. vi. 1–8, depicting four teams of parti-coloured steeds going forth in all directions to vindicate the ways of God in the discipline of history. Educationally, too, the spiritual training of Israel demanded a similar recapitulation. No doubt the previous visions were admirably adapted to encourage the hopes and fire the zeal of the leaders; but who can be surprised if the prophetic teaching, on the part of the people, had only been

responded to with considerable reservations? Few of them, it may be surmised, were endowed with the prophet's spiritual insight. Few of them had meditated, as he had done, in the seclusion of the myrtle grove. Consequently the sordidness of their present was not touched, as it might have been, with the glory of their coming destiny. They were strangers, in large measure, to the stimulus of that undecaying hope. In truth, the glory of that future was very apt to be dimmed by the hard, prosaic facts of the present. The prophet had doubtless sketched in glowing colours the future expansion of the city, the installation of Joshua, the honouring of Zerubbabel, and the cleansing of the whole land; but where was there any sign of the promised "shaking of the nations," which was to be the historical starting-point for all these blessings? Where was there any indication that the age-long promise of divine help and deliverance was about to be fulfilled? Leaving the argument ecclesiastical on one side, what

was the explanation or justification for allowing things to remain as they were? And Zechariah, in answer, could only recapitulate and re-emphasise the truths already enunciated: or say, like another seer—

> "What in me is dark,
> Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
> That to the height of this great argument
> I may assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men."

1. The Vision.

Meditating in the Kedron valley, the prophet lifted up his eyes, and beheld four war-chariots (*Kriegswagen*, Orelli) coming forth from between the two mountains—Mount Zion on the one side, and the Mount of Olives on the other—and the two mountains were as mountains of brass. They rose above him as frowning and unapproachable precipices; and as the valley between is represented elsewhere as a theatre of divine judgment (chap. xiv. 4, Joel iii. 12), the inaccessible gorge

from which the four chariots rushed forth seemed to the prophet's gaze to be a fitting symbol of the divine seat of government, and a fitting point of departure for the disciplinary providence of the Lord. In the first chariot were *red* horses—representing blood and carnage, according to the usual significance of that colour (Rev. vi. 4); in the second, *black* horses—a no less expressive symbol of famine and mourning; in the third, *white* horses—denoting, as in Rev. vi. 2, joy and victory; while in the fourth chariot were *grizzled* or *piebald* horses—suggesting, it may be, the more normal type of divine providence, that it is neither all light nor all dark, but a mixture and measure of both. Beholding these four teams rushing forth from the rocky defile, the prophet turned to the interpreting angel, and said, "What are these, lord"? And the angel answered and said, These are divine emissaries sent forth *towards* (so Wellhausen) the four winds of heaven, in order to execute Jehovah's commands. For having approached, as the

mounted scouts of the Lord, and given in their report to the man among the myrtle-trees (chap. i. 11), they are now seen hasting away in the early morning to punish and subdue the nations, as the agents of His judicial wrath.

They went forth in all directions. The black horses went into the north country, and were immediately followed by the white ; for if Israel had been twice smitten in that far-off land—first by Sennacherib and Sargon in the fall of Samaria, and then by Nebuchadnezzar in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem — not once, but twice, would the martial might of Jehovah smite that ruthless power beyond the river, until the white steeds of his celestial army would return with the joyous trophies of His victory. Or did the Jewish community look further back to the birthtime of their nation, and recall the bitter oppression of their fathers in the valley of the Nile ? The spotted or speckled horses went forth in that direction to enforce the divine will among the swarthy inhabitants of the south.

While, to complete the cycle of divine supervision and government, the *red* horses (so the Syriac and Aquila in ver. 7) rushed forth full of energy and eagerness to seek a field of action for themselves, and were honoured by receiving a roving commission—to go to and fro through the earth, and strike a blow for righteousness wherever the forces of evil or the purposes of Jehovah should require. From no quarter of the globe, indeed, was Israel to fear the approach of any possible invader. For even now the Lord of Hosts had seized all the strategical points by means of His celestial warriors, and no power on earth would be able to break through their serried ranks, and despoil or harass His people. In a word, the long-promised "shaking of the nations" was no figment of the imagination after all. The black horses were a sufficient guarantee that the humbling of the nations would assuredly be effected: while the white team afforded an equally significant pledge that the succeeding era of victory and peace would be signalised by manifold blessing for

all. Hence the vision closes with the striking announcement in ver. 8 that the various teams, having accomplished their allotted tasks, the spirit of the Lord's jealousy was at last appeased in the north country, and the character of His eternal Providence justified.

2. A Pledge of its Fulfilment.

The last thing the prophet saw before he left the grove of myrtles was the disappearing forms of the black and white horses on their mission to the far north; and now the first thing that appeals to him when he returns to the city and temple is the sight of certain deputies from their Babylonian brethren, who have arrived with princely gifts for the temple in their hands (vers. 9–15). To the spiritually illumined insight of the prophet the white steeds of the celestial army were already beginning to return. For in the visit of these deputies there was something more than a sequel or appendix to the entire series of visions; there was also a distinct

pledge that the teaching contained in the preceding paragraph was in process of being realised. Even to the duller comprehension of the people, a visit from their Babylonian brethren was an event that could easily be grasped and appreciated; an event, therefore, that might easily be utilised for their moral and spiritual advancement, if only Zechariah their prophet and teacher knew how.

That he was not left to his own limited resources is evident from the opening formula of ver. 9, "*The word of the Lord came unto me*," saying, "As to the taking of gifts from those of the captivity, even from Heldai, from Tobijah, from Jedaiah and *from* Josiah the son of Zephaniah (so Kittel), who have come from Babylon; take indeed silver and gold, and make *a crown* (singular, as in Job xxxi. 36), and set it upon the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest." The crowning of Zerubbabel, as a type of the Messianic fulfilment, would have done equally well (cf. iv. 14); but there were various reasons, not difficult to specify, why Joshua the

high priest should be selected instead. For one thing, a scion of the house of David, like Zerubbabel, might have overlooked the typical significance of the act, and been led to cherish ambitions that could scarcely be realised within the limits of the Jewish colony. In the words of Pusey, it would have been confusing in the highest degree—"a seeming restoration of the kingdom, when it was not to be restored; an encouragement of the temporal hopes, which were the bane of Israel." For a similar reason, it might have provoked unnecessary complications with Persia. Recognition of a Jewish governor, with the standing of a Persian satrap, was one thing; to allow him to assume the dignity and wear the insignia of royalty was another and totally different matter. Indeed, to one like Zechariah, no such ambiguous action was possible. The type of the coming Branch could easily be found in a different office and representative. It could be found in the person of Joshua the high priest. No doubt it was something new and unheard

of in Israel to see the high priest with a royal crown upon his head ; but so far from flattering Joshua with this instructive piece of symbolism, the proclamation which was immediately added (ver. 12) was a sufficient reminder of the essentially typical character of the act.

"Speak unto *them* (all those who were present at the symbolical coronation—so Wellhausen), saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the Branch ; for He shall shoot up out of His place—springing up out of obscurity into wide-spreading luxuriance (cf. iii. 8) ; and *He* shall build the temple of the Lord ; and *He* shall wear the insignia (*Ehrenzierde*, Orelli) and sit and rule upon his throne ; and He shall be a priest upon his throne—not less than a ruler—and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Clearly in this depiction of the coming Branch we are carried a great deal further than in chap. iii. 8. Not only is He to grow and flourish like the goodly cedar, until His benign shadow fills the land ; but, as God's

vicegerent on earth, He will do, what no Zerubbabel or Joshua can do, build the ideal, world-wide temple of Jehovah, of which Zerubbabel's, or even Solomon's temple, was only the instructive type. Nay, more, in so building and extending the spiritual kingdom of Jehovah, He will exercise the dominion and wear the highest honours of royalty; He will be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. cx. 4). He will be both King and Priest—a King whose interests are entirely taken up with the erection of a spiritual temple, and yet a Priest whose sacerdotal functions will be equally consecrated to the well-being of Jehovah's throne and people. In a word, He will be a spiritual king, or a royal priest, whose sole object and continual endeavour will be to secure an era of abiding and universal peace.

Who could read so sublime a delineation of Israel's future and conclude that the coronation of Joshua began and ended with himself? It was a ceremonial transaction that pointed far beyond its more immediate

application. It was at once a memorial and a pledge — a memorial of the truth that Jehovah, the God of Israel, had indeed returned to His people, and a pledge of the ultimate victory and supremacy of Jehovah's cause. It was therefore to be read in the light of Israel's spiritual calling, and accepted as a vindication of her undecaying hope. The crown itself, no less than the coronation, ought to be interpreted and preserved from the same idealistic standpoint. Let it be laid up in the temple as a memorial for Heldai, and for Tobijah, and for Jedaiah, and for Josiah the son of Zephaniah (reading Heldai for Helem, and Josiah for Hen, according to the Syriac and ver. 10)—a memorial of the gifts and sacrifices already brought and dedicated to the service of Jehovah ; but a pledge also of the far more costly presents that would yet be brought and presented by all nations in the glory of the Messianic fulfilment. "They that are afar off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord, and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."

And yet, finally, what is the meaning of the solemn ethical condition, which this preacher of righteousness has placed at the close of the present chapter—"This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God"? Does it mean that the advent of the Messianic age and the ultimate ingathering of the nations, are made dependent on the loyalty and obedience of Israel? Does it suggest that the white steeds of Jehovah's army will never again be seen in the grove of myrtles, unless Israel, according to the flesh, be there to bid them welcome? No, the vindication of eternal providence is not always easy in any circumstances; but to postulate the ultimate thwarting of Jehovah's plan, because of the disloyalty of any particular nation, would render any such vindication impossible. The ethical condition is added, not for the sake of the Messianic fulfilment, but for Israel's sake, that she might have a part, a large and worthy part, in the final coronation. Her disloyalty would not thwart the divine plan. The Messianic

age would assuredly be ushered in, and so, too, would the final ingathering of the nations; but a disobedient Israel would not be there to see it, the Lord of the whole earth would be crowned without her. The eternal providence of Jehovah would not be thwarted. If it were not wrought out in Israel's loyalty and devotion, it would be wrought out in Israel's rejection. And yet this need not be. The whole object of Zechariah's visions has been to render all such failure on the part of Israel a practical impossibility. Let the chosen nation but turn to the Lord, and realise the greatness of her spiritual destiny, and her part in the final triumph of Jehovah's cause would be fully assured. The white steeds of the celestial army would again be seen in the Kedron valley. They would arrive and give in their report to the Lord of the whole earth. And when that report was trumpeted forth from between the two mountains of brass, all the world would know that God's eternal providence had been justified.

APPENDIX

The Value of Exposition

A strong reaction in the direction of revived Bible study is "one of the great *desiderata* of our times." So writes one of the ablest of our present-day teachers, and all the signs seem to suggest that he is right. The hour has arrived for a frank presentation of the positive elements of divine revelation, and for a candid recognition of the fact that the time of reconstruction has come. This reaction ought to be cordially welcomed and encouraged. In addition to all our reading about the Bible —its origin, its history and its inspiration— we shall do well to read a good deal more *in* it, and show through all the avenues of modern education what are its true contents and character. It may easily happen that for the Church of the future there is

a great spiritual uplift along this path. God will honour His word if we do. Only let the practical aspects of the subject be duly emphasised, and the motto of each student be—

> "O my soul, thou hungry bird,
> Taste the honey of the Word."

This, however, must imply a first-hand acquaintance with the text. The exposition desiderated has to be true to all the criteria of Bible interpretation as known to modern scholarship. Hebrew syntax, Septuagint Greek, New Testament synonyms and Hebraic figures of speech are all needed for a due appreciation of the Sacred Writings; and there will be no powerful reaction in the direction of fresh Bible study until these practical aspects of grammar and Hebrew style are intelligently grasped and utilised. It is from this point of view that the foregoing studies in Zechariah's visions have been written. At every step they have sought to keep in touch with the text. They have been based, first and chief, on the wealth of information

contained in the *Oxford Hebrew Lexicon*, and on the suggestive and luminous footnotes in Kittel's *Hebrew Bible*. If, in addition to these, the author were asked to tabulate the six best helps, among easily accessible literature, for the preparation of similar lectures on "The Man among the Myrtles," he might specify the following :—

Zechariah and his Prophecies, by C. H. H. Wright. This was the Bampton Lecture for 1878, and is easily one of the best books on the subject.

Die Kleinen Propheten, by J. Wellhausen. The short exegetical notes are most illuminating, and always provocative of thought. Cf. also the article, "Zechariah," by the same author in the *Ency. Brit.* and *Ency. Bibl.*

Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten, by C. von Orelli, in the Kurzgefasster Kommentar, of which a translation is published by T. & T. Clark.

The Minor Prophets, by E. B. Pusey—a book that will yield many a gem to the expositor.

Appendix

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, by Marcus Dods, in the Series of Hand-Books for Bible Classes. No preacher can read this little book without being deeply indebted to it. It is a model of condensation.

The Prophets of Israel, by C. H. Cornill, in the "Religion of Science Library." For any one who wishes to read a brilliant and fascinating sketch of Hebrew prophecy as a whole, no more helpful or reasonable purchase could be suggested than this little volume. It may be had through Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London, price 1s. 6d.

The first two studies, "The Prophet Zechariah" and "The Man among the Myrtles," appeared in substance in *The Homiletic Review*; and thanks are due to the Publishers for kind permission to reproduce them in this little volume.

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